Leadership for Systems Change: A case study in Finland

This case study was prepared in the context of the 2017-2019 OECD multicountry project on civil service leadership focussing on a variety of challenges and practices relating to the changing nature of leadership in the public sector. It was peer reviewed at a workshop with the ten countries participating in the project. The case study explores the challenges for Directors General in collaborating and co-ordinating the implementation of the Government Action Plan in Finland. The main challenges found in implementing such horizontal working methods through vertical ministries concern leaders’ capabilities to balance horizontal and vertical priorities and the institutional factors outside the leadership capability realm such as resources allocations for horizontal projects, structural arrangements, and accountability mechanisms. In response, the case study analyses and proposes management tools and interventions to support Directors General in leading organisations and strengthening leadership competences.
# Table of Contents

**Leadership for Systems Change: A case study in Finland**................................. 1

Introduction.................................................................................................................. 3

THE CASE ...................................................................................................................... 5

Directors’ General role in implementing the Government Action Plan and leading new ways to work horizontally........................................................................................................... 5

DGs’ role and perceptions: What has a change in working methods meant in practice? .......... 8

Conclusions................................................................................................................... 20

Further Reading ........................................................................................................... 21

## Figures

Figure 1. Government Action Plan (GAP) strategic priorities and key projects...................... 7

Figure 2. Building leadership, skills and performance through the civil service management board, Ireland.................................................................................................................. 17

Figure 3. Netherland’s vision on public leadership................................................................. 18

## Boxes

Box 1. Leadership and management styles to encourage systems change ......................... 3
Introduction

Purpose driven systems change denotes a process by which all aspects affecting a policy problem are addressed to reach the intended outcome. For example, eradicating domestic violence may entail changes in regulation, culture, working across police, judicial system, medical care, community programmes in a totally new way to reach outcomes that are sustainable in the long-term (read further in OECD 2017a). Thus, purpose driven systems change usually requires new ways of working across silos and also a different style of leadership and management.

Changing systems and working methods in the public sector however is not easy, in part because public services must be continuously available – they cannot be turned off, redesigned and restarted – governments must continue to deliver on promises, and path dependency and institutional legacies make it challenging to change ‘how it has always been done’.

Initiating and sustaining systems change over time requires new ways of thinking about the role of leaders and their leadership styles, especially when attempting to transform long-established and complex systems (see Box 1). Leadership needs to be open, and encourage the participation of a critical mass of actors representing different positions and roles – all of whom have to understand the need for change and become willing to act on it. For example, outcome driven change may mean that some stakeholders lose from the change. How to accept hard value trade-offs, is part of the change process. This is crucial for achieving results.

Box 1. Leadership and management styles to encourage systems change

Systems change suggests the need for a style of leadership that encourages and provides space for employees to innovate and work differently, and one that emphasises horizontal engagement, delegation and collaboration.

While systems change has implications for skills and ways of working throughout the civil service, leadership is particularly implicated. The idea of collaborative leadership is growing, and provides a counterbalance to the top-down transactional and transformational leadership styles emphasised in bureaucracies and new public management. Collaborative leadership emphasises leadership as a trait projected horizontally. Leaders catalyse and facilitate collective action, and leadership roles are generally dispersed among different levels of an organisation and multiple stakeholders. Nevertheless, leaders at the top remain of key importance as they establish the culture of trust and frameworks for delegation and accountability.

While transformational leadership – which recognises the role of motivation and human emotion in the leader-follower relationship – continues to be important, there is a need to go beyond this to consider how collaborative leadership could drive systems change, especially when it comes to rethinking goals and practices and changing the way that problems and challenges are reframed and new practices are designed, tested and adjusted. Sorensen and Torfing (2015) point to discussions and debates around “adaptive” and “pragmatic” leadership:
Adaptive leadership aims to determine which public activities to maintain and which to adapt and transform. It then seeks to develop new practices by crafting and testing prototypes and by aligning people across organisations in order to ensure effective execution and to facilitate the integration of new with old activities.

Pragmatic leadership aims to transform the culture of public organisations in ways that enhance double loop learning and use existing tools to solve problems by changing established practices – including transformative learning that develops new metaphors and narratives that help frame what is difficult to comprehend, expand knowledge and toolboxes, and change identities and roles.

Common across these leadership styles is Wilson’s concept of the “Anti-hero”, which brings together a number of traits mentioned in transformational, adaptive and pragmatic leadership. An anti-hero adapts their leadership style according to circumstances. Their leadership is inherently sensitive to other people and aware of the limitations of their own knowledge and skills. The five pillars of anti-heroic leadership are: Empathy, Humility, Flexibility (leadership style and behaviour), Acknowledgement of uncertainty and not knowing, and Self-awareness i.e. being highly aware of their core values and behaviours (read further in Wilson, R. (2013)).


The OECD brought together existing work on systems change and Senior Civil Service leadership to delve into a specific case in the Finnish central government: how Directors General collaborate and co-ordinate the implementation of the Government Action Plan – a Plan built to improve the steering and implementation of the government’s strategic priorities through the tracking and financing of key cross-cutting projects.

Through interviews with senior leaders across a variety of ministries, the OECD and a peer from the Netherlands explored what this new system of working means for senior leaders – particularly at the DG level – the issues and challenges DGs experience in implementing this plan, and how a diverse range of contextual factors shape their leadership role for co-ordinating within and across ministries.

This case study looks specifically at the Directors General level – the second highest administrative position in the government below Permanent Secretaries – as often times this is the level of leadership that gets pulled in two directions: they feel caught between visionary expectations of the most senior leaders, and the operational demands of their organisation. In Finland, the DG level is challenged to translate the horizontality of the

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1 Director General (DG) is the second highest administrative position, below the Permanent Secretary (administrative head of the ministry) position, and at times below an Undersecretary depending on the size of the Ministry. There are approximately 60 DGs Finnish central government. The number of DGs per ministry also varies depending on the size of the ministry.


3 Mainly Directors General with the exception of some Permanent Secretaries and Under-Secretaries
Government Action Plan into concrete action, yet there can be a tendency to enter into siloed working where whole-of-government issues get fragmented and lose their horizontality.

The case study explores two sets of issues which challenge the implementation of horizontal working methods through vertical ministries: first, leaders’ capabilities to balance horizontal and vertical priorities, and to adapt to the new ways of working; second, a range of institutional factors outside the leadership capability realm such as resources allocations for horizontal projects, structural arrangements, and accountability mechanisms.

As a result of international dialogue on the challenges Directors General faced, a number of different institutional and HR mechanisms were proposed to support them in building their capability to lead their organisation in ways that encourage the implementation of horizontal priorities in the GAP.

THE CASE

Directors’ General role in implementing the Government Action Plan and leading new ways to work horizontally

As a result of research undertaken by the Finnish government on reforming their steering system (the OHRA project), the Government Action Plan (GAP) was created to guide the implementation of the key projects and reforms defined in this current government’s Strategic Government Programme. Co-ordinated by the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) Strategy Secretariat, the five cross-cutting strategic priorities of this government are materialised in the form of 26 key projects (5 key projects per strategic priority with the exception of 6 in the priority of Knowledge and Education. Each key project has a minister responsible for its implementation and measures with their own timeframe and phasing (see Figure 1).

This Action Plan varies from previous implementation plans of government programmes by:

- Providing a more detailed description of the timetables, measures and financing of key projects
- Making a one-off appropriation of EUR 1 billion for the key projects and determining the allocation of the funds in the General Government Fiscal Plan for 2016–2018. Additional appropriations are divided by priority.
- Designating a minister responsible for implementation of each key project and a ministerial working group for each strategic priority
- Designating the Government Strategy Secretariat to track and monitor implementation, impact, effectiveness and potential redirection of the key projects.

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4 International experts from Australia, Canada, Estonia, Finland, France, Ireland, Israel, Netherlands, Slovenia, Scotland and the United Kingdom participated in a two day workshop held in Helsinki, providing feedback on the Finnish challenges and possible interventions to build DG-level leadership capabilities for systems change.

The Government assesses the implementation of the key projects and reforms regularly in its strategy sessions that are held every second week. The action plan as a whole is revised annually in the spring in connection with the updates to the General Government Fiscal Plan.

The Action Plan is a new way of working. The more integrated design of the government programme and the GAP (with thematic areas not fitting into a single ministry) aims to enhance working in more a collaborative way across sectors to achieve common goals for society.
Figure 1. Government Action Plan (GAP) strategic priorities and key projects

Source: Finland, a land of solutions Mid-term review of the Government Action Plan
DGs’ role and perceptions: What has a change in working methods meant in practice?

There was a broad feeling that the government was moving in the right direction with a more integrated and thematic approach with the GAP, and that the new way of working benefited collaborative and team working among sectors towards a common goal for society. However, it was also mentioned that there were challenges in terms of the level of implementation in the ministries, and that some government structures and mechanisms have not adapted to this new way of working. At the Permanent Secretary level, there are a number of coordination forums, and these are generally perceived to be working well to address the horizontal goals in the GAP from whole-of-government perspective (also as co-ordination is easier amongst a group of 12 PSs), yet at the DG level it was more of a challenge, given the number of them and their central role in the implementation of the GAP.

There were a number of common themes and challenges DGs raised when discussing the GAP, the change in working during this government, and specifically working in a thematic way across government:

- In almost all conversations, DGs expressed challenges with regard to resource allocation and sharing. While additional resources were allocated to thematic projects in the GAP, the single ministry leading the GAP project receives the financing. These challenges with budget flexibility and aligning resources with thematic goals in the GAP (both human and financial) were raised frequently, indicating a perception that the budget processes is not appropriately aligned to these new ways of working. Some suggested that the PMO and Ministry of Finance need to work more closely together when designing process that affect whole-of-government.

- Accountability structures are still mainly vertical and performance is usually assessed informally between DGs and Permanent Secretaries, with no formal mechanisms tied to delivering on thematic/horizontal projects. Leadership agreements are currently being implemented for the Directors’ General 4 year term, with plans to adopt the practice at Permanent Secretary level. However when asked ‘how did you know you achieved the objective?’ there is difficulty on the DG and
Joint DG trainings commissioned by the Ministry of Finance and conducted by HAUS (Finnish Institute of Public Management) have been set up with a view to developing more common understanding and trust amongst DGs. While DGs voiced that these joint trainings were helpful on an informal level to meet with their colleagues, they suggested that the underlying coordination problems stem less from not knowing each other, but rather from (mis)understanding each other’s priorities, organisational culture, and decision-making logic. Given this, many respondents suggested that there could be more benefit in allowing them to learn about their counterparts’ day to day work (topic/challenges) as opposed to working on the usual cross-sector topics. Some mentioned that added value could be in building joint understanding of the realities that different DGs are working in: joint trainings on surface issues will not solve co-ordination problems as they know each other and can call or email freely.

Perceptions and take-aways regarding the GAP and thematic working also varied as a result of a diverse range of contextual factors the Directors General found themselves working within, including:

- **High and low priority policy issues:** There was a difference among DGs’ perceptions of the GAP and the new way of working depending on whether their policy issues or projects were prioritised in the Action Plan. While this is a reality of working in government, DGs leading on high-priority, timely, ‘flashy’ projects found that co-ordination was generally easier between ministries. In contrast, DGs that had to pull at threads of sentences in the GAP to relate to their policy issues and secure small amounts of additional funds found incentivising co-ordination with other ministries to be more difficult.

- **Policy development vs. implementation:** DGs working on earlier phases of the policy development cycle tended to experience more ease at horizontal coordination than those working on implementation of a new policy directive. It appears that designing systems change is easier than implementing it.

- **Varying political contexts influencing vertical and horizontal working:** Both the leadership style of the Minister, their commitment to particular projects their ministry is leading, and the political tension within a coalition government influenced DGs perceptions regarding the ease of working horizontally to implement key projects in the GAP. Some DGs felt the horizontal work with the GAP was just layered over their existing work, with no extra time or resource allocated. Many felt that they were pulled in two directions, both with horizontal and vertical priorities, where the traditional vertical priorities would still win i.e. “if a vertical file is the minister’s priority, you drop everything else”. Positive collaboration between different ministries also can depend on party politics between Ministers in a coalition government. Regardless of ministers’ initial commitment to collaboration, there was often a sense that each ministry struggled to ensure their Minister reaped the rewards of success.

- **Leadership style affected by the landscape DGs find themselves in:** there appeared to be heterogeneity between DGs, with many DGs seeing themselves as subject matter experts and others seeing their role as leaders providing space and
strategic guidance to their experts. This could be a result of the DG’s personal leadership style and philosophy, as well as a variety of contextual factors, including the length of time the DG has worked in the same ministry, the culture of the ministry itself, the outside career experienced previous to their current role, the number of staff and middle managers they oversee, and the demands put on them from their own Permanent Secretaries and Ministers. Some DGs voiced frustration of not being able to be the leader they wanted to be because of the leadership styles of those above and around them.

**DG Personas**

DGs’ experience implementing the GAP varied depending on the interplay between the diverse contexts they are working in and their own leadership styles, background, and capabilities. To demonstrate this variety, four DG Personas were developed by the OECD based on the interviews with DG. These were discussed and worked through during the first day of the meeting in Helsinki.

**Leadership styles and their impact on horizontal working**

The below Personas reflect four different DG career histories, expertise, leadership approaches and challenges associated with working horizontally across government. Each includes feedback from international experts on how and what tools can be used to improve the capacity of the leader to better lead their organisation to implement the horizontal programmes in the GAP.
The Law-maker

This DG Persona values rules and process, and believes that coordination and collaboration work when mandated through formal means and mechanisms (e.g. legislation, traditional consultation mechanisms). The Law-maker finds discomfort in new or different ways of working. The challenges faced by this DG stem from a tendency to revert back to traditional or old forms of co-ordination that have proved successful in the past. However, the interconnectivity associated with the GAP priorities suggest that previously used techniques will not prove as effective in implementing the horizontal priorities in the GAP.

Solutions for addressing challenges and building the necessary leadership capabilities

A range of tools and interventions could either help improve this leader’s capabilities for working horizontally to implement the GAP, or find other roles that better match their capabilities. There is also a possibility of creating new roles to support her in change management and making the necessary change (as well as understanding it). Other solutions along these same lines include:

- Putting this leader in new situations, whether to confront their leadership style or to change their outlook and views through career mobility, collaboration initiated and led by a different ministry on a new or challenging project, or reconnect them with the end user in a new way that shifts their traditional thinking (i.e. service design)

- Looking to the leadership and behaviour of those above this DG, including the Permanent Secretary and the Minister. Are they on board and putting the GAP priorities on the agenda? Can they serve to create an understanding of the need to
change? Or do they (or who else) need to start questioning the effectiveness of this DG’s leadership style?

- Using management tools such as 360 degree assessments (choosing wisely those assessing the DG); skills and leadership development plans to learn new skills while recognizing the worth of the law making skills; setting personal development goals; or a motivating mandate that allows this DG to understand, internalise, and lead based on this mission.

Subject Matter Expert (SME)

This DG rose to senior management levels quickly based on his particular expertise, and successful performance related to a policy issue that was previously a government priority. He did not have any career planning or management that prepared him for leadership demands. While his expertise, in-depth knowledge, and passion for his specific files is to be commended – and can, if used properly, engage or energize civil servants in his organisation – this type of leadership is often challenged with an ability to see the bigger picture (which is essential for implementing horizontal initiatives in the GAP) or the value in building other leadership capabilities such as collaborating outside of silos and managing the political interface.

Solutions for addressing challenges and building the necessary leadership capabilities

There are a number of proposed solutions and additional questions this persona brings forward, not only about his leadership style but also regarding the HR systems that
managed his career and brought him to a top leadership position. One of the main questions is whether he has leadership potential? If so, then the question becomes how to tap this potential. If not, there are a number of additional questions such as how the system allowed for him to attain this level, whether the system values leadership over subject matter expertise, and how the performance system or contracts with PSs assesses leadership at this level. Keeping traditional SMEs in leadership positions without addressing their leadership capabilities gaps can risk the possibility of missing interlinkages with policies, and challenges that come at them from sideways as they are not experienced at taking a more horizontal view. Some possible solutions and additional questions for reflection include:

- How can career paths of SMEs be managed more flexibly? If, for example, it is assessed that the SME is not suited for leadership, are there senior roles in the system that they can progress to that do not require leadership capabilities i.e. ministerial or expert advisors? A more challenging question is how to unseat a leader that is unable to adjust to a new way of working? (For more information on this see the Australian example below on re-assessing and retiring senior leaders that are unable to demonstrate behaviours required of new competency frameworks).

- Tapping into potential and supporting the development of leadership capabilities in SMEs could focus on HR and other tools that help them gain broader perspectives, whether through mobility programmes (both earlier in their career and during leadership positions); having horizontality as criteria for senior leadership positions; and performance assessment systems that help DGs clearly define their goals, including what is clearly expected of them, and using 360 performance reviews, mentoring, and talent management. Assessing the way leaders achieve their goals (behavioural/leadership competencies) is as important as assessing the delivery of the goal itself.

- Structural changes could also be considered including changing incentive structures and approaching roles more horizontally.
Overloaded Achiever

This DG is new to this level of leadership, and finds it difficult to balance competing demands and political priorities. She views horizontal collaboration and changing ways of working as positive, though she struggles to manage both her vertical organisational pressures and the horizontal cross-cutting priorities in the GAP. She is particularly challenged with understanding that the priorities of the government should drive the work of her organisation, and at linking her organisation’s work to the horizontal projects of the GAP.

Solutions for addressing challenges and building the necessary leadership capabilities

Possible solutions to address the leadership challenges faced by this new DG centre heavily around building capabilities that are necessary for the role, including support mechanisms that help to build her political understanding. These could include:

- Mentoring and other support and capacity building mechanisms that allow this new DG to see how others in her role are leading their organisations, and to manage her expectations. The Permanent Secretary or a more experienced DG could also help to mentor or build her capabilities for understanding the political level, and better navigating their requests concerning government priorities and cross-cutting initiatives such as the GAP (i.e. “serving the masters she has”).

- Better prioritisation and goal setting. This DG needs to have her work and objectives better focused, which can be supported by her Permanent Secretary and an effective performance management regime. Shared goal setting with the Permanent Secretary, using a more horizontal view when setting priorities, and
regular conversations on performance can help this DG to feel less overwhelmed and focus her efforts on the issues that matter.

- Taking stock. This DG could benefit from standing back from her day-to-day, taking a helicopter level view, and reflecting on her current management and leadership capabilities and gaps. She needs to assess her capabilities, including her self-management skills, and find solutions on how best to manage her current environment.

**Frustrated Newcomer**

This DG is relatively new at managing an organisation at the central government level, and is highly frustrated that his previous leadership style is not proving effective in his new environment. In his previous leadership role, he rarely got bogged down with expert details, preferring to trust his employees and focusing on bigger picture, strategic issues, and how he could get the most out of employees in his organisation. Now, as a result of how the political level is operating (namely his minister), this DG is pushed to be an expert on all topics covered by his organisation, and to collaborate horizontally with ministries that may not see the value in co-operation. He is challenged with learning the new system and the complex environment he now operates in, which will require a recalibration of expectations, and a focus on leadership capabilities necessary for this role such as agility – the ability to effectively confront and nimbly transform obstacles and roadblocks.6

Adapting and thriving in this new working environment will be of key importance for this DG.

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6 [https://hbr.org/2018/03/beating-the-odds](https://hbr.org/2018/03/beating-the-odds)
Solutions for addressing challenges and building the necessary leadership capabilities

There are a range of interventions that could help this newcomer adapt his leadership style and capabilities to the needs of the organisation, which also include proper expectations management from the start during recruitment, and a good on-boarding programme to put this DG on the right track for success. Possible solutions to address the leadership challenges faced by this new DG centre heavily around helping him understand the new context and organisational environment he finds himself in. These include:

- Creating an environment where newcomers and established leaders can communicate to develop a new way of working. This could be done formally or informally, either by creating a governance structure that allows the DG group to have peer support and meet others in similar situations and trying to create change in their organisations, or informally by creating entry points into existing networks.

- Empowering the newcomer to implement change in the organisation, where change is due, but to also better understand that the context in which he finds himself in will require a leadership approach that needs to be comfortable with ambiguity and complexity.

- Agree with Permanent Secretary on what success looks like, and have regular conversations on performance, progress towards organisational goals, and where capability development is needed to help the DG match their skill set to the needs of the organisation, and adapt to the organisational culture.

Supporting senior leaders with the capability to ‘walk the walk’ in systems change: using HR tools and institutional mechanisms

As outlined to some extent above, there are a range of different institutional and HR mechanisms that can support senior leader’s abilities to adapt to the new ways of working – and to work horizontally to implement the GAP. These support mechanisms include structural changes or arrangements to enhance senior leaders’ role in the implementation of cross-cutting objectives, learning opportunities (experiential, peer-to-peer, trainings etc.), and allowing strategic resource allocation that supports leaders (instead of hindering them) in implementing the cross-cutting priority-goals of the GAP.

Structural arrangements to support leadership for systems change

Structural or institutional arrangements can help to engage the senior leadership and give them ownership over whole-of-government objectives. Effective structural arrangements can help leaders to feel supported while adapting to new ways of working that are often associated with systems transformation – as opposed to feeling as if structures are caught in the past and working against them.

Some solutions to help bring leadership on board to the new ways of working – and to enhance their understanding of the value of the changing working methods – range from governance forums that bring these leaders together to reflect on the shared goals of the government, to using performance frameworks, leadership agreements or other mechanisms to clarify senior leaders’ priorities and track their performance on cross-government objectives.
Structural arrangements to support leaders to work within a new system include:

- Governance arrangements that bring DGs together in a dedicated and sustained senior leadership forum, to discuss and understand the value of working horizontally to implement the GAP, to reflect on its shared goals, but also to allow DGs to have peer support and meet others experiencing similar situations and challenges. In Ireland, for example, the Civil Service Management Board served as a forum where senior leaders (Secretaries General) regularly came together to discuss the cross-cutting goals of the Civil Service Renewal Plan, and where each SG co-owned specific actions, which helped ensure accountability, strong investment and greater ownership of the horizontal Plan (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Building leadership, skills and performance through the civil service management board, Ireland**

- Changing some incentive structures and approaching some aspects of senior leaders’ roles more horizontally. Performance structures often favour vertical organisational priorities. Shifting some elements of performance frameworks, leadership agreements or other mechanisms could help to clarify senior leaders’ priorities and track their performance on cross-government objectives. A useful starting point could be to begin with problem definition, and what the best design is for a particular horizontal challenge – whether that is formal or informal. While we tend to look at government as a clean system with clear structures, arrangements for implementing horizontal priorities may benefit from a bespoke approach which might not be clean or set.

- Recognising that structural arrangements to help senior leadership work more horizontally will not prove effective without addressing senior leaders’ behaviours, how they react to these structures, and encouraging them to think more broadly as
opposed to just at departmental level (which can be helped though mobility programmes).

*Leadership competencies, learning and reflection to support leadership for systems change*

A large amount of the solutions outlined above centred on building the necessary leadership capabilities for leading the implementation of horizontal activities in the GAP, and what learning opportunities could help build these. However, there is also a need to consider cases where DGs may not be able to reach the level of capability needed for today’s working methods, what this means in terms of the HR and career management systems that brought these leaders to their current roles – including the competencies valued and assessed at this level – and what options or alternative career paths exist for leaders in this position.

The New South Wales Government in Australia, for example, defined 4 separate points on leadership career pathways and developed new leadership success profiles for each (which included behavioural capability profiles and leadership style & attributes). All leaders were re-assessed against these new capability profiles and mind sets, retiring senior leaders that were unable to demonstrate behaviours required of new the profiles, or providing development support through their leadership academy to reach the capability level of the profile.

Supporting senior leaders and helping them build capabilities to lead their organisation in the new ways required to implement the GAP can also include:

- Developing and implementing competency frameworks that value horizontal working and partnering across organisations; and using these in practice to attract, develop, and assess the behaviour of leaders. Thinking about how performance conversations are carried out, how behaviours are assessed and the mobility criteria for promotion to senior leadership positions is equally important. The Netherlands’s Office for the Senior Civil Service for example have developed a vision for their public leaders that includes mobility criteria and values leadership capabilities.

*Figure 3. Netherlands’s vision on public leadership*
Learning opportunities that allow leaders to build their capabilities to implement horizontal initiatives, and take a broader whole of government view. These can include experiential learning (i.e. through mobility programmes early and later on in leader’s careers as well as assignments on the job), developmental relationships (i.e. mentoring, feedback, peer-to-peer learning etc.) or course work and training. Putting leaders in new situations, whether to confront their leadership style or to change their outlook and views can shift their leaders traditional siloed thinking. The idea of “fleet planning” is also important, to ensure there is a systemic approach to targeting and developing leaders earlier on in their career.

Strategic resource allocation to support leadership for systems change

The capacity of DGs to ‘walk the walk’ in implementing the horizontal priorities of the GAP – and to adapt to the new ways of working – was challenged by resource allocation that was not aligned with the new system. Allowing strategic resource allocation to support leaders in implementing the cross-cutting priority-goals of the GAP requires consideration of how current resource structures are enabling and inhibiting the new ways of working. Resource flexibility – and particularly leaders’ capabilities to lead their organisation flexibly and shift, reuse and innovate with the human and financial resources they have –
will be much more important than heavy structures or an overall of the system that forces one solution for all horizontal activities. Bespoke solutions might be the way of the future for horizontal working.

Conclusions

The case study presents an example of the challenges faced by implementing horizontal working methods through vertical ministries. These challenges include leaders’ capabilities to balance horizontal and vertical priorities, and to adapt to the new ways of working; and a range of institutional factors outside the leadership capability realm such as resources allocations for horizontal projects, structural arrangements, and accountability mechanisms. While most DGs saw the value in the new ways of working that followed from the latest iteration of the GAP, this level of leadership was in need of more and better support mechanisms that allowed for them to adjust their leadership styles to support the integrated working required from the GAP. These support mechanism are outlined above.

Overall, certain leadership styles can be more effective in supporting systems change in organisations and in encouraging new ways of working. In terms of building this type of leadership – which emphasises for example horizontal engagement, delegation and collaboration – the personas act as a starting point to baseline the capabilities of this leadership level; and to start thinking about the management tools that could support DGs and other senior leaders more broadly to lead organisations that work in the new ways required by the GAP. As mentioned above, there are a number of management tools and interventions to support DGs in leading such organisations, including having leadership competencies that value qualities of this leadership style (i.e. collaboration, horizontal engagement, partnering etc.), assessing against them, or for example using employee engagement surveys to keep a finger on the pulse of the organisation.

Some final takeaways that resulted from this case study include:

- Convincing Leaders, Leaders convincing civil servants: Political support and communicating the value of achieving horizontal priorities in the GAP is important. Not only is it important for Ministers to show senior leaders there is value in looking outside the organisation they are leading, but senior leaders need to convince civil servants in their organisations of the value in doing so as well.

- There is equally a need to get leaders together more frequently (e.g. Action Room) to discuss horizontal priority policies for government. A particular room for them to get together, know each other, know each other’s challenges, and learn from each other. Developing a culture of problem solving amongst leaders that is open to new ways of working (as opposed to discussing what would prevent the success of out of the box solutions) is important, along with political support for risk taking.
Further Reading
